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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [DR](#) [KSAC](#)

SUBJECT: ANNUAL OSAC CRIME/SAFETY REPORT

REF: 08 STATE 132056

I. Overall Crime and Safety Situation:

A. Crime Threats

Travelers to the Dominican Republic, a country that is described as a beautiful island of paradise with sugar colored white sand beaches, might get the impression that the country is immune from crime. While the State Department rates Santo Domingo's crime threat as high, the Dominican Government and local papers reported an increase in the number of incidents that involve violent crimes and in other criminal activity such as robberies, residential burglaries, kidnappings, thefts from vehicles and of credit/debit card information. The country's most violent cities were Santo Domingo, Hato Mayor, La Vega, Samana, San Jose de Ocoa and San Cristobal. Some of the factors that make this island paradise most vulnerable to crime and violence - unemployment, large scale migration to urban areas, drug and alcohol use, the drug trade and the widespread availability of weapons. Statistically, in 2007 38 percent of deaths were attributed to criminal activity, compared to 65.5 percent this year; 58.4 percent of all victims were between the ages of 18 and 34; 62.5 percent of all crimes happened between 6 PM and 6 AM; 55.2 percent of the crimes happened between Monday and Thursday and 92.6 of the victims were men, who did not cooperate with the assailants.

B. Safety

Road Conditions:

If you plan to drive in the Dominican Republic, one should beware that utmost caution, offensive and defensive driving skills are required. Traffic laws are similar to those in the United States, but the driving is aggressive due to lack of adequate traffic controls and enforcement. Drivers in vehicles and on motorcycles/scooters are in the most part aggressive and erratic, often failing to yield the right of way even when road signs or signals indicate that they should.

Traffic Accidents and Driving under the Influence - often result in serious injury or death. This often is the case during the holiday season and when commercial vehicles, such as buses or trucks, are involved. Traditionally, vehicles that are involved in accidents are not moved, until authorized by a police officer. Drivers who violate this norm may be held liable for the accident. Local law requires that a driver be taken into custody when an accident causes serious injury or death, even if the driver is insured and appears not to have been at fault. The minimum detention period is forty-eight (48) hours; however, detentions frequently last until a judicial decision is reached (often weeks or months), or until a waiver is signed by the injured party (usually as the result of a settlement). In addition to traffic accidents, Dominican law requires that a driver be taken into custody for driving under the influence and the minimum detention period is forty-eight (48) hours. Visitors may want to consider hiring a professional driver during their stay in lieu of driving themselves. Licensed drivers who are familiar with local road conditions can be hired through local car rental agencies. In case of accidents,

only the driver will be taken into custody.

Local transportation - for inter-city travel, one may consider using one of the more reputable tourist bus companies and for travel within the city, hotel taxis or one that has been ordered by telephone is recommended. For safety reasons, it is recommended that one avoids using public transportation, such as route taxis ("carros publicos") and urban busses ("guaguas").

Local laws - require the use of seat belts; use of hands-free cellular devices while driving and that motorcyclists wear helmets. During the evening hours, Police do conduct random stops of vehicles and those individuals under the influence can face severe penalties.

Road Hazards:

Pedestrians - locals do tend to step out into traffic without regard to corners, crosswalks, or traffic signals. Remember, pedestrians do not have the right of way, and walking along or crossing busy streets, even at intersections with traffic lights or traffic police present can be very dangerous.

Travel at Night - on intracity highways and in rural areas should be avoided, due to animals on the road, poor road conditions, vehicles being driven at excessive speeds often with malfunctioning headlights or taillights. Rolling blackouts within the urban and rural areas increase the danger of night travel.

Travel to Haiti - if you are considering overland travel between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, it is highly recommended that you first consult the Country Specific Information Sheet for Haiti as well as the internet site of the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince for information about travel conditions in Haiti.

Overview of the country's road network: According to a World Bank study, the country's road network is approximately 19,000 kilometers, of which 5,000 kilometers are highways (relatively extensive) and the rest are rural roads that requires rehabilitation. 81 percent of the paved highways (3,831 kilometers) are in good or fair condition and about 70 percent of the unpaved highways (1,222 kilometers) are in poor condition and in need of rehabilitation or reconstruction. The average traffic volume in the highway network is 1280 vehicles per day; 2,650 vehicles per day with payment of asphalt or cement concrete; 370 vehicles per day in highways with surface treatments and 193 vehicles per day in unpaved highways. About 15 percent of the vehicles are trucks (unknown condition) in all surfaces.

II. Political Violence

1A. Historical Perspective - Dominican Republic (DR) history is a series of dramatic events, filled with revolution and political unrest. After centuries of foreign rule, the DR gained independence in 1865 at a severe cost to the civil peace. Since then, the people have experienced political and civil disorder, ethnic tensions and long periods of military rule, occupation, oppressive dictatorships, military interventions and standing battles with corruption.

1B. Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime - Even though the Dominican Republic is considered a low threat post for terrorism, this country still faces the challenge of focusing on, and directing efforts against organized crime. Organized crime within the Dominican Republic is involved in a variety of activities, among which is drug trafficking, kidnapping, and corruption.

As referenced in a 2007 United Nations Office report, and based on today's environment- the flow of drugs into the country by Colombian cartels has aggravated the country's situation in a range of ways:

- Local drug use;
- Couriers are often paid in product rather than cash - this has secondary effects on domestic crime problems, including youth gangs, prostitution, and market related violent and property crime;
- Drug transactions involve firearms, and firearms are often traded for drugs;
- Movement of drugs inevitably involves corruption of local law enforcement officials, as well as other civil servants; and
- Laundering the proceeds of drug sales undermines legitimate economic activity (i.e. real estate market, local casinos and currency exchange houses)."

1C. International / Trans-national Terrorism - Dominican Republic is an integral part of the Caribbean and as such, a likely transit point for extremists from within the region, African continent and to Europe. Visitors to the island are still reminded to maintain a high level of vigilance and to take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness.

1D. Civil Unrest - Civil unrest within the Dominican Republic has become more common occurrence in recent months due to the lack of adequate electricity and water resources. In addition to public protests within the National District, to include the City University, demonstrations and strikes have occurred outside of Santo Domingo without advance notice and have turned violent.

Examples:

23 September 2008, violent street clashes in response to a police shooting, a local group "FARPO" initiated a riot in San Francisco de Macoris. Aside from blocking the main thoroughfare and within the surrounding neighborhoods, rioters were throwing items and burning tires with trash.

5 November 2008, in response to the issuance of stiff traffic fines, violent street clashes between the Police and the transportation union were taking place in Santo Domingo (Zona Industrial de Herrera at Avenida 27 de Febrero and Avenida Luperon). As the police fired tear gas to disperse the crowd, the protesters threw rocks at the police and at oncoming cars.

7 November 2008, US Embassy Santo Domingo continues to receive information about ongoing protests throughout the country due to the persistent problem of blackouts. Reported criminal activity is on the rise, such as burglaries, robberies, auto theft and vandalism within the neighborhoods that are impacted most by the blackouts within the National District, Santo Domingo, Puerto Plata, Villa Altagracia, Santiago, San Juan del La Maguana, Navarrete and Bonao.

11 November 2008, a National Police officer was shot while on patrol in Navarrete. According to sources, the officer was shot possibly an AR-15 rifle while he was monitoring the street demonstrations due to ongoing blackouts throughout the city. Ongoing demonstrations took place in the cities of Santiago, Bonao, and La Vega. The people continue to demand the Government take action to prevent the shortages of electrical power.

III. Post-Specific Concerns:

1A. Environment: The Dominican Republic is located in the center of the archipelago Antillean, a location that places the island in the pathway of hydrometeorological phenomenas. Such phenomenas include hurricanes, tropical storms, tropical depressions and other natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods and droughts. Americans are advised that many buildings are not constructed to U.S. wind and seismic codes and many - particularly those buildings that have parking underneath them ("soft stories") - may suffer severe damage or collapse during an earthquake.

Earthquakes - within the DR, many municipalities qualify as high seismic risk:

Northwest to the far Northeast Section of the island - Montecristi, Mao, Santiago Salcedo, Moca, San Francisco de Macoris, La Vega, Nagua and Samana;
In the southern section of the island - San Juan de la Maguana, Neyba and Jimani.

Geomorphological Characteristics - the Dominican Republic is most effected by the passage of hurricanes, exposure to landslides, flooding in low lying areas and a coastal area that is susceptible to the influence of tidal waves.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) - the Atlantic hurricane season is officially from 1 June to 30 November, a six-month period that encompasses over 97 percent of reported tropical activity in the Atlantic basin.

1B. Industrial and Transportation Accidents:

The potential for industrial accidents by large infrastructures and industrial facilities containing hazardous materials, especially after a natural disaster does exist.

Some of the large infrastructure and industrial facilities that may pose a risk:

Oil and Gas Infrastructure - Refinery

Locations:

- Bonao by Falcondo
- Haina by Refineria Dominicana de Petroleo

Hazardous Material:

- Petroleum hydrocarbons
- Hydrogen sulfide
- PCV
- Acids and alkalis
- Liquefied natural gas and other combustibles

Hazard:

- Flammable
- Toxic
- Corrosive
- Spontaneously combustible and explosive

Electric Power Stations - 140 Megawatt Powerplant

Locations:

- Support mining activities at Pueblo Viejo

Hazardous Material:

- Ammonia
- Fuel

Hazard:

- Toxic Gas
- Flammable

Agro/Food Industry - Large Cooling Plants

Locations: no exact location

Hazardous Material:

- Sulfur Dioxide

Hazard:

- Toxic Gas

Agro/Food Industry - Sugar Industry

Locations: no exact location

Hazardous Material:

- Sulfur Dioxide

Hazard:

- Toxic Gas

Chemical Industry - Textiles

Locations: no exact location

Hazardous Material:

- Benzene
- acids and alkalis
- Chlorine, etc.

Hazard:

- Toxic
- Corrosive
- Flammable

Hazardous Waste - Recovery/recycling/Reuse Facilities

Locations: Zona Industrial de Haina

Hazardous Material:

- various chemical products

Hazard:

- High Toxic

Public Areas and Services - Hospitals

Locations: no exact location

Hazardous Material:

- Mercury
- Radioactive Sources
- Solvents
- Compressed Gases
- Infectious Substances, etc.

Hazard:

- Toxic
- Radioactive
- Flammable
- Infectious

Specific Basic Industry - Cement Plants

Locations: no exact location

Hazardous Material:

- Incineration of hazardous waste
- Cement plants use fuels like coal, oil, petroleum, coke and natural gas
- Infectious Substances, etc.

Hazard:

- Flammable
- Toxic

Note: The town of Bajos de Haina is severely contaminated with lead from a now-closed down vehicle battery recycling smelter and is on the list of the world's 10 worst polluted places.

Mining Activities - Polymetallic Deposits (copper, zinc, silver, gold)

Locations, such as:

- Maimon - about 70 km northwest of Santo Domingo
- Pueblo Viejo
- Neita
- Las Palmas, San Juan
- Los Comios
- El Centenario, etc.

Hazardous Material:

- Any mine can use fuels, explosives, metals, ammonium nitrate
- Gold mines use mercury, cyanide, arsenic
- Non-precious metals may use arsenic, cyanide

Hazard:

- Liquid toxic / persistent
- Carcinogenic
- Toxic

General Risks of Mining Activities:

- Tailing dam failures
- Failure of waste rock dump
- Pipeline failure
- Transport of chemicals to/from site
- Ground substance
- Fire
- Atmospheric releases
- Explosions

Transportation Accidents: As of 18 December 2008, the U.S.

Federal Aviation Administration assessed through their International Aviation Safety Program that the Dominican Republic meets ICAO standards.

- Last Reported Aviation Incident: On 6 February 1996, a Birgin Air, Boeing 757, Turkish Registry, that crashed near Puerto Plata, resulting in the death of 189 individuals.

1C. Kidnappings - kidnappings have returned while vigor and that the country is becoming a victim to a phenomenon called "express kidnappings", a method of abduction that is used to obtain a small ransom, that a company or family member can easily pay upon request. In response, the police are aggressively responding to reported incidents and working to

solve them. Victims of reported cases included business persons, family members, common citizens and even taxi drivers.

National Kidnapping Statistics for the period covering January to October 2008:

Area	Number of Reported Kidnappings
National District	2
Santo Domingo East	4
Boca Chica	3
Santo Domingo West	2
Santo Domingo North	1
Santiago de los Caballeros	2
Higüey	1
San Rafael del Yuma	1
La Romana	2
Dajabón	1
Valverde, Laguna Salada	1
Valverde, Mao	1
Puerto Plata, Altamira	1
Puerto Plata, Ganánico	1
San Cristóbal, Villa Altagracia	3
San Francisco de Macorís	1
Sanchez Ramirez, Cotuí	3

1D. Drugs and Narco-terrorism - Various independent sources, such as the Council on Hemispheric Affairs and local news agencies have described the Dominican Republic as a springboard for drug operations by the Colombia cartels to the United States and Europe. According to host government anti-narcotics authorities, more than 200 trafficking flights occur annually, and over the past five years over 19,410 kilos of cocaine and marijuana were seized, 351 kilograms of heroin and about 430,000 tablets of ecstasy. This flow of drugs, also brought frequent violent clashes between drug traffickers, such as the notable killing of seven Colombians in Paya, Bani, who were accused of bringing some 1,300 kilos of cocaine into the country.

IV. Police Response:

Under the command of Major General Rafael Guillermo Guzmán Fermin, a number of key initiatives, the Democratic Security Plan, are being instituted to make the country safer, improving the quality of life of its citizens, committing to its laws and protecting human rights. A National Police force of approximately 11,000 police officers are being trained to serve the community, as reliable and efficient professionals. Fermin is committed to prevent, investigate and combat crime, with a police force that is committed to serve the community; to respect life, dignity and human rights; provide an effective and timely service; promote continued development and professionalism; to work proactively with other law enforcement agencies and institutions of justice; to work with the community to identify solutions; and to protect equally all citizens without discrimination of race, gender or social status. Corruption and official misconduct remain a serious concern that is being diligently investigated by the Internal Affairs Directorate for the National Police. As per their mandate, Internal Affairs is working to prevent, investigate, monitor, control and recommend corrective actions for any improper conduct, in full compliance with laws, rules and regulations that govern the actions of the police force.

1A. How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment:

Visitors traveling in the Dominican Republic are not protected by the laws and constitutional rights of their country, rather they are subject to local laws. The judicial process in the DR can last up to seven years, which may result in lengthy pre-trial detainment in a local jail. If you are arrested or harassed, contact the U.S. Consulate, American Citizens Services at (809) 221-2171.

Synopsis on criminal procedures in the Dominican Republic:

Phase One:

Arrest and Detention - According to the Dominican constitution, a person detained or arrested by the police may be held without charges for up to 48 hours. During this 48-period, the prosecutor and the police conduct an initial investigation of the case.

Right to an Attorney - A detainee is typically questioned as part of the investigation by the police. According to local law, a detainee is entitled to have an attorney present during any questioning, as well as at any of the hearings or trials. If the detainee cannot afford an attorney, the government will provide a public defender upon request and the detainee also has the right to remain silent.

Habeas Corpus - according to the constitution, any person who is detained for more than 48 hours without being formally charged is entitled to request a hearing of habeas corpus. Habeas corpus is a physical release of an arrestee from prison while awaiting trial and the defendant is required to remain in the country until the charges are finally resolved.

Phase Two:

The District Attorney sends the case to a coordinating judge, who will assign one of the investigating judges to conduct a preliminary investigation. This judge will examine the evidence that is presented by the District Attorney and based on that evidence, a determination will be made whether the detainee should remain in custody. Should the judge determine that there is sufficient evidence to detain, a date for a preliminary hearing, typically three months to one year, will be set. A defendant may request bail at any time during this process.

Phase Three:

At a preliminary hearing, the investigating judge will hear evidence and make a decision, either:

- there exists no grave, sufficient and corroborating evidence of guilt, or
- there is sufficient evidence and detainee remains in custody and the case is assigned to a First Instance Court.

Phase Four:

First Instance Court is assigned the case and a court date is set for Conocimiento de Fondo del Caso. The trial generally proceeds in the following sequence:

- Judge questions the prisoner to see if the testimony conforms to the statements in the documents;
- The prosecuting attorney may direct questions to the prisoner;
- The defense may ask further questions, call witnesses and present defense arguments;
- The prosecuting attorney delivers a summation; and
- The trial is concluded and the defendant remains in custody pending rendering of a sentence.

Phase Five:

If the defendant is found guilty, the detainee has ten days to appeal the decision. If the case is appealed, the prisoner is incarcerated until a hearing is set before a five-judge or three-judge court of appeal.

1B. Where to Turn for Assistance:

A prompt police response to reported incidents is normally limited to local traffic conditions and available resources, such as on-hand police officers, functional vehicles and reliable communications. The Dominican Republic does also have a specialized police force, known as "Politur" (a cooperative effort between the National Police, Secretary of the Armed Forces and the Secretary of Tourism), that provides

first responder type assistance to tourists. If you are a victim of crime, the Politur will help you to get to a police station, to file a police report and to seek further assistance. However, Americans who were victims of a crime should contact the U.S. Consulate, American Citizens Services, as soon as possible.

Contact Numbers:

National Emergency Telephone Number	911
US Embassy, American Citizen Services	(809) 221-2171
Fire Department	(809) 682-2000 and (809) 682-2001
Red Cross	(809) 682-4545
National Police	
- General Number	(809) 221-3004
- Information and Public Relations	(809) 685-1835, ext 2016
- Robbery Division	(809) 682-0039, ext 2135
- Homicide Division	(809) 685-6010, ext 2225
- Fraud Division	(809) 686-7652, ext 2118

IV. Medical Emergencies:

Medical care in Santo Domingo is adequate for most problems. Appointments are generally easy to obtain and can be scheduled for the same week. Payment for services is expected at the time of the appointment (or when the ambulance arrives). Ambulance response times range from 15 to 45 minutes. US insurance plans are not accepted nor will claims be filed for you.

Ambulances:

Movimed - (809) 532-0000..Santo Domingo
Pro Med - (809) 948-7200..Santo Domingo

Hospitals:

Clinica Abreu	(809) 688-4411..Santo Domingo
Clinica Abel Gonzalez	(809) 227-2235..Santo Domingo
CEDIMAT	(809) 565-9989..Santo Domingo
Plaza de la Salud	(809) 565-7477..Santo Domingo
Clinica Corominas	(809) 508-1171..Santiago
Centro Medico Bournigal	(809) 586-2342..Puerto Plata
Centro Medico Central Romana	(809) 532-3333..La Romana
Hospiten Bavaro	(809) 686-1414..Bavaro/Punta Cana

VI. Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim:

IA. Crimes and Scams that are Unique or Especially Frequent in the Region:

Drive-by Robberies: The most common and easily avoidable type of crime in the Dominican Republic is the drive-by robbery that is normally performed by one or two assailants (usually male) on a motorcycle, scooter, or even a bicycle. The assailant will drive up in front of or behind their potential victim (getting on the sidewalk if necessary) and grab anything that is in arms reach - purses, cellular phones, necklaces, etc. To avoid becoming a victim of this type of crime, remain aware of your surroundings and be alert for motorcycles and scooters approaching you from any direction. If you see one approaching, simply move out of the way - behind a tree, into a driveway, anywhere where they cannot reach you. If the assailant cannot get close enough to you, he will not stop (although he may circle around and try again later).

Armed Assaults: Armed assaults are becoming more frequent during the hours of darkness and the victims are usually traveling alone. The RSO's office strongly urges all Americans to cooperate if confronted with any type of weapon. Crime in the Dominican Republic is generally not violent if you cooperate; however, an assailant will not hesitate to use violence if it appears that you plan to resist.

Credit Card / Debit Card ATM Fraud: Teams of organized criminals either install equipment that captures your

personal bank information from legitimate bank ATMs or they have someone on the inside who has access to card and personal identification (PIN) numbers.

The RSO's office strongly urges that you contact your financial institution before your scheduled departure to the Dominican Republic, and: :

- provide them with dates and location where you plan to visit; and

- limit the amount of money that can be withdrawn;

During your visit:

- always be aware of anyone around you when using an ATM;

- guard the key pad when entering your PIN so others can't see your entry;

- do not use an ATM that you suspect has a skimming device;

- only carry cards you absolutely need, such as a credit card in lieu of a debit card;

- avoid using ATM machines to withdraw cash;

- save receipts

In Case of Fraud:

- immediately contact your financial institution

- contact and file a report with American Citizen Services Section of the US Consulate.

Note: Fraudulent charges may not appear until well after you have returned to your place of origin. To reduce your risk of possible ATM fraud, use only ATMs that are located in major hotels, or collocated with banks.

Local Guard Services: The quality of local guard companies varies widely. Post advises American businesses and private individuals to evaluate their options carefully before selecting a company.

Sex Tourism - prostitution is legal within the Dominican Republic, but illegal child prostitution also exists, that includes both boys and girls who are working mainly in the tourist areas. According to Dominican Republic law, the age of consent is eighteen and the code for minors has been revised to strengthen provisions against child abuse. Offenses of child abuse carry a sentence of between 20 and 30 years and \$2,000 - \$10,000 fine.

B. Areas to Avoid and Best Security Practices:

- During the hours of darkness, walking in public parks or areas that are isolated, such as Parque Mirador del Sur
- Areas that surround Santo Domingo's National District, such as Santo Domingo Oeste, Este, Norte and Sur
- Certain areas within the National District:

- a. East of Avenue Maximo Gomez, such as Simon Bolivar,

- Luperon, Espaillat, Capotillo

- b. South of Parque Mirador del Sur,

- c. West of Avenue Luperon

- d. Avenue George Washington / Paseo Presidente Billini / Avenue del Puerto

Best Security Practices:

- Hotel rooms and telephones are not bugged; however, your business purpose will be more secure if you act as if they were.

- Keep your hotel room key with you at all times, if possible.

- At night, secure your passport and other valuables.

- Do not divulge the name of your hotel or room number to strangers.

- Invest in a good map of the city. Note significant points on the map such as your hotel, embassies, and police stations. Make a mental note of alternative routes to your

- hotel or local office should your map become lost or stolen.

- Be aware of your surroundings. Look up and down the street before exiting a building.

- Learn how to place a local telephone call and how to use coin telephones. Make sure

- you always have extra token or coins for telephone use.

- Avoid jogging or walking in cities you are not familiar with. If you must jog, be aware of the traffic patterns when

crossing public streets. (Joggers have been seriously injured by failing to understand local traffic conditions.)

- Speak with the bellman, concierge, and front desk regarding safe areas around the city to jog, dine, or sight see. Ask about local customs and which taxi companies to use or avoid.

- Avoid renting vehicles or driving unless you are familiar with the local traffic laws and customs.

- Valuables should normally be left at home. The rule of thumb is if you neither want nor can afford to lose them, DO NOT TAKE THEM! However, if you must carry valuables, the best way to protect them is to secure them in your local offices. Second best is the hotel safe.

- Keep a copy of your passport with you at all times and keep the original in the hotel safe. Only relinquish it if you are required to identify yourself to local authorities for any reason.

- Vary the time and route by which you leave and return to the hotel. Be alert for persons watching your movements.

- Be cautious when entering public bathrooms.

- Purse snatchers and briefcase thieves are known to work hotel bars and restaurants waiting for unknowing guests to drape these items on chairs or under tables only to discover them missing as they are departing. Keep items in view or "in touch." Be alert to scams involving an unknown person spilling a drink or food on your clothing. An accomplice may be preparing to steal your wallet, purse, or briefcase.

- Pools or beaches are attractive areas for thieves. Leave valuables in the hotel, but carry a token sum to placate violent thieves. Sign for food and beverages on your room bill rather than carry cash.

- Avoid persons you do not know. Prostitutes, both men and women, take advantage of travelers through various ploys: such as knock out drugs, confederates, and theft from the victim's room.

VII. Further Information:

All Embassy personnel can be reached at the Embassy main telephone number: (809) 221-2171 (24 hours/day).

Consul General: Michael Schimmel

Mission Director - US Agency for International Development:

Richard Goughnour

Foreign Commercial Service Attach: Robert Jones

Foreign Agriculture Service Attach: Jaime Rothschild

Regional Security Officer: Mark Bandik

Post developed its OSAC program in October 2004. For more information or to be added to our e-mail distribution list, please contact Mark Bandik, Regional Security Officer, at (809) 731-4300 or bandikmg@state.gov.

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